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ABSTRACT

This issue summarizes Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day's "Systemic School Reform," an analytic essay discussing research into the effectiveness of current education policies and policy system development in numerous states. The essay proposes a design for a systemic state structure that supports school-site improvement efforts and is based on clear, challenging standards for student learning. Policy components would be tied to these standards and reinforce one another in providing instructional guidance to schools and teachers. This brief begins with several observations concerning policy, examines current barriers to school improvement, and sketches an ameliorative strategy. School-by-school restructuring efforts are unlikely to produce substantial change. Educational success is hard to generalize because our educational system lacks coherence, and a basic skills emphasis pervades both policy and practice. Change is hampered by fragmented authority structures, conflicting goals and policies, and deficiencies in college teaching, professional development, and curriculum. A strategy for systemic reform would combine both top-down and bottom-up approaches and feature a unifying vision and goals, a coherent instructional guidance system, and a restructured governance system. A sidebar examines teacher professionalism and educational equity issues. (31 references) (MLH)

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Putting the Pieces Together: Systemic School Reform

This issue of **CPRE Policy Briefs** summarizes "Systemic School Reform," by Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day,[1] which appears in full in *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing*, edited by Susan Fuhrman and Betty Malen (Falmer 1991).

"Systemic School Reform" is an analytic essay which draws on research conducted by CPRE and others about the effectiveness of current education policies. The author also looked at developing policy systems in a number of states. Smith and O'Day propose a design for a systemic state structure that supports school-site efforts to improve classroom instruction and learning. The structure would be based on clear and challenging standards for student learning; policy components would be tied to the standards and reinforce one another in providing guidance to schools and teachers about instruction.

In a manner similar to the strategy proposed by "Systemic School Reform," a number of states are coordinating various policies to send coherent messages to schools about instructional goals. California, for example, has developed curriculum frameworks that promote problem-solving and complex thinking. Assessments of student performance tied to the frameworks are being developed and phased in. California's practice of statewide textbook adoption makes it possible to assure that grades and textbooks conform to the state's content goals. The state is also beginning to tie staff development efforts to the content frameworks.

Similarly, Connecticut is developing new state-of-the-art assessments tied to a common core of learning. New York's Regents Testing System provides a mechanism of reinforcing content goals with assessments. Kentucky and Vermont also appear to be moving in the direction of coherent instructional guidance.

These developing policy systems raise many questions. How is consensus within states about content goals developed and sustained? How detailed are the curriculum guidance policies and what room do they leave for school flexibility? How do the systems evolve over time to incorporate new knowledge, especially in rapidly developing fields like student and teacher assessment? How are they implemented by schools and teachers? How do these policies accommodate the diverse needs of students, schools and communities? Are the messages sent by policy reinforced by families, communities, employers and colleges?

These questions and the analytic foundation provided by "Systemic School Reform" underlie a number of studies CPRE is conducting. We will report our findings in subsequent briefs about systemic reform efforts. In the interim, we hope this brief is useful to policymakers and educators thinking about the relationship between state policy structures and school-based improvement.

This brief follows the general organization of "Systemic School Reform," which begins with several observations about policy and school-level success, examines current barriers to school improvement, and then sketches out a strategy to improve the quality of instruction and learning. A sidebar on page 3 of this brief deals with the relationship between the strategy and two important issues: teacher professionalism and educational equity.

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Successful Schools and Educational Policy

For the last 10 years, education reform has been at the top of the nation's agenda. However, while many individual schools in school districts of all sizes and types made remarkable progress, the system as a whole did not improve. In fact, the decade ended with little evidence of meaningful gains in learning (Mullis and Jenkins 1990) and heightened concern about the productivity of education and of the nation as a whole.

Many analysts attribute the meager results to the very nature of reform efforts in the early 1980s, which they characterize as "top down" and "more of the same." These efforts included longer school days; increased requirements for graduation from high school; higher standards for teachers; and more testing for students— focusing primarily on competence in basic skills. These reforms did little to change the content of instruction, directly involve teachers in the reform process, or alter the reigning notions of teaching and learning (Cohen 1990; Carnegie Forum 1986; David et al. 1990).

Largely in response to these deficiencies, a "second wave" of reform rhetoric began building in the mid-to-late-1980s calling for a fundamental rethinking and restructuring of schooling, not a bolstering of the existing system. The key concepts of this second wave are decentralization, professionalization and a bottom-up process with the school as the basic unit of change.

The rhetoric often points to characteristics of successful schools suggested by both research and common sense: a staff of enthusiastic and caring teachers who have mastered both subject matter and a variety of pedagogies for teaching it; a well-organized, challenging curriculum, integrated across grade levels and appropriate for students of diverse experiences, cultures and learning styles; a high level of teacher and student engagement in the educational mission of the school; and ample opportunity for parents to support and participate in the education of their children. Most of the second wave reforms seek to move schools toward this or similar images of "success" by placing authority in the hands of school personnel.

While the full effects of many restructuring reforms are yet to be seen, it is not too soon to see that a school-by-school approach is not likely to result in substantial change of the type needed in nearly all schools. Why not? What makes it so difficult to generalize success in our educational system and why are successful schools so exceptional and vulnerable? Two major factors provide some of the answers:

1. Our educational system lacks coherence.
2. A basic skills emphasis still pervades both policy and practice.

Lack of Coherence in the Educational System. Our complex, multi-level governance structure, with a number of separately constituted centers of authority at each level, frustrates purposeful coordination. The policy generation machines at each level and within each level have independent timelines, political interests, multiple and changing special interest groups, and few incentives to spend the time and energy to coordinate their efforts. As a result, policies compete, overlap and often conflict.

Over the last 10 years, policy fragmentation has worsened. Education's political visibility put a premium on distinctive policy, which generates political credit for the author, over policy integration. The unprecedented volume of policy activity–at all levels of government[2]–heightened the likelihood that policies would not be integrated. Even policies emanating from a single level, the state, sent conflicting signals. For example, entry-level standards for teachers were raised at the same time loopholes to address shortages were created (Darling-Hammond and Berry 1988; AACTE 1985; Sykes 1990). Further, states developed K-12 curriculum policies and teacher professional development policies on parallel, non-intersecting tracks. It was not uncommon, for example, for state mandated or recommended teacher evaluation instruments to ignore content goals for students.

Policymaking frequently exhibits a "project" mentality, whereby each problem is addressed with a distinct special program. A new classroom management system, an inservice day on the "left and right brain," a new laboratory filled with computers but little appropriate software, a

[2]See Darling-Hammond and Berry (1988), Firestone, Fuhrman and Kirst (1989), and Coley and Goertz (1990) for reviews of state-level policy activity. For discussions of activity at the local and national levels respectively, see Fuhrman and Elmore (1990) and Smith, O'Day and Cohen (1990).

tougher attendance policy, a new evaluation and accountability policy, are all familiar concepts or "solutions" to the nation's teachers. Some efforts may be very promising for as long as they last, but most are short-lived "projects" to be replaced by a different "concept," a new panacea. Few leave much of a lasting trace.

Policy fragmentation is a source of significant dissatisfaction to school personnel who feel great responsibility for educational improvement but frustration over the mixed signals and the complex administrative requirements that attend individual programs. A recent Education Commission of the States survey of state and local leaders in 11 states found that "the variety of reforms and not knowing which works sends confusing messages to school leaders and impedes the will to change" (ECS 1990, 1). As a result, school officials may ignore or subvert some policies. Dedicated and well-meaning school personnel find that the array of mandates, guidelines, incentives, sanctions and programs drain their energies from serious school improvement.

An Emphasis on Basic Skills. Neither the first or second wave reforms have altered on a broad scale the inadequate models of teaching and learning that currently define the content and pedagogy of American education.

For all the effort expended in reform, the processes and content of instruction in most public school classrooms of today are little different from what they were in 1980 or 1970, containing little depth or coherence, emphasizing isolated facts and "basic skills" over opportunities to analyze and solve problems (Cohen 1989, 1990, 1991; Cuban 1990).

Some state policies of the early 1980s intentionally built on the "back to basics" emphasis that began in the late 1960s. For example, states instituted minimal competency tests that focus on low-level skills and standards and mandated or encouraged the use of such tests as criteria for promotion and graduation. Other statewide policies had the same effect without such purposeful intent. For example, accountability systems attached more and more consequences to scores on standardized tests that emphasize broad coverage of unconnected facts and the ability to quickly find the one, right answer to a series of unrelated, multiple choice, limited time-span items. Most "first wave" reforms simply "intensified" current practice (Firestone, Fuhrman and Kirst 1989), emphasizing quantity in terms of numbers of courses or length of school day, rather than quality.

Many restructuring efforts speak of complex problem-solving and higher-order thinking but focus primarily on site-based management, shared decision-making and professional collaboration. While important elements of the change process, alone they will not produce the kinds of changes in content and pedagogy that appear critical to our national well-being (Fuhrman, Clune and Elmore 1988; Elmore and Associates 1990; Clune 1991). Even more importantly, the policy system does not provide support to teachers and other school-level reformers for significant improvements in teaching and learning.

The Current System and Barriers to Change

Fragmented authority structures and multiple short-term and often conflicting goals and policies provide little support for school improvement. Smith and O'Day examine how major components of educational policy reflect, and in fact reinforce, the incoherence of the system, inhibiting change efforts.

Systemic Reform and Two Key Issues

Teacher Professionalism

A common criticism of state curricular reforms is that they diminish the sense of professionalism, and, therefore, the effectiveness of teachers by restricting their autonomy and authority to control the content of instruction in their classroom (McNeil 1986; Sykes 1990). The reforms proposed in "Systemic School Reform" would focus on core conceptions of knowledge and skills to be acquired over several years of schooling; they would not spell out detailed curricula that might stifle teacher creativity.

Moreover, part of the power of a coherent system is that the knowledge and skills in the state content frameworks would provide a basis for "expert knowledge" as well. The frameworks would define fields of knowledge that competent professionals would command. Mastering the content and how to teach it would truly "empower" teachers, setting them apart from almost everyone in society by virtue of their sophisticated knowledge base, and giving them a common basis for professional dialogue. In addition, teachers and other subject-matter experts would provide the professional expertise necessary to develop, refine and update the state curriculum frameworks.

Educational Equity

Exclusive reliance on school-based change is likely to disadvantage minorities and the poor. Districts and schools with large numbers of such students often have less discretionary money to stimulate reform and more day-to-day problems that drain administrative energy. A systemic state reform strategy would insure that changes toward newer conceptions of curriculum and instruction are available to all groups, more or less equally. Local discretion and professional judgment within the structure of common curricular frameworks would allow teachers the flexibility to meet the varying needs of their particular students and still hold them to common goals for all children.

Unless curricular reforms are buttressed by a coherent state system that links teacher training, teacher certification, the curriculum and testing together into a structure within which we can legitimately hold schools accountable, we will surely enlarge the differences that continue to exist between the quality of instruction available to rich and poor, minority and majority students.

Teachers are not prepared with the kinds of knowledge and skills required if schools are to change to deliver more challenging curriculum. The disjuncture between teacher knowledge and teaching practice begins with the entrenched condition of teaching in the nation's postsecondary system. Prospective teachers learn the content of arts and science disciplines in courses outside of schools of education that are generally taught in a lecture style, fact-oriented fashion.

In many large colleges and universities, courses in mathematics, science and history typically have examinations with short-answer, machine-gradable questions, while literature courses require papers of only a page or two. Licensing and certification systems focus on evidence of adequate credit accumulation in content areas; current tests of prospective teachers typically represent only weak attempts to ensure that prospective teachers have the knowledge of content and skill in pedagogy to do an effective job in the classroom (Smith and O'Day 1988).

The condition of inservice professional development is little better than that of preservice training. Inservice systems are built primarily on graduate credit requirements for continuing certification and salary increments. Because of a lack of coordination between higher education institutions and K-12 school systems, teachers typically take courses badly coordinated with the demands of their jobs. The content of these courses often depends more on the intersection of the teacher's schedule with the interests of professors in local institutions than on the needs of K-12 students.

Professional development experiences organized by schools or districts are generally more closely attuned to the specific needs of schools but limited in scope and duration, frequently lasting a day or less only once or twice a year. Only rarely are they sufficient to help teachers make major changes in their approach to instruction. Furthermore, the federal, state and local budgets for inservice professional development are small and extremely vulnerable to budgetary constraints (Guskey 1986; Little et al. 1987; McLaughlin 1990).

Current curricula and instructional materials also provide little support for improvements in content and pedagogy. Teachers and students alike find the materials uninteresting and unimaginative. Both students and their future employers complain that school learning bears no connection to real life experience or problems.

The fragmented policy system contributes to the poor quality of curriculum materials. Diffuse authority structures and multiple goals within the system foster mediocrity and conservatism both in the publishers' supply of curricular materials and in the demand generated by local educators. Inconsistent policy results in textbooks that merely "mention" topic after topic, covering each so superficially that the main points and connections among them are often incomprehensible to the student (Tyson-Bernstein 1988; Newmann 1988).

Educators must respond to the same conflicting demands and lack of common goals as the publishers, leading many to unintentionally support and perpetuate mediocrity in content by choosing materials that are comfortable (familiar), easy to work with pedagogically (fragmented, factual, simple), and that lead to the most manageable classrooms (again, fragmented, factual, easy to monitor).

Indeed, as ironic as it may seem, this situation has actually contributed to the development of a common instructional practice and a common basic skills curriculum. The emphasis on basic skills has contributed to a significant educational success—considerable progress since 1980 in closing the gap between minority and

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white students on measures of national achievement (Smith and O'Day 1991). But basic skills are not sufficient to meet employers' needs in the future. Nor is a democratic society well served by schools focusing on narrow conceptions of knowledge.

Furthermore, rigid hierarchical models of learning, where basic skills are presumed to be the foundation of more complex skills, are outmoded and inconsistent with what we know about how people learn. According to Resnick (1988, 45), the most important single message of recent cognitive research is that:

> Complex thinking processes—elaborating the given material, making inferences beyond what is explicitly presented, building adequate representations, analyzing and constructing relationships—are involved in the most elementary mental activities... all of this implies that no sharp separation between "basic" and "higher order" skills can be made.

While educators and observers have recognized and written extensively about the inadequacy of rigid models of learning and the curricula they engender, the fragmentation of the policy system makes substantial, widespread change in instructional practice and the curriculum virtually impossible.

Without a supportive policy structure, innovations emerge but soon die out. Teachers or schools experiment with particularly creative and promising curricula and instructional practices, often with considerable success. But most of these innovations become marginalized or disappear altogether. Programs developed in one sector (e.g., curriculum) are rarely linked to the extensive necessary changes in other sectors (e.g., teacher professional development). School-based innovations are frustrated by policies sending conflicting signals. For example, school efforts to introduce more challenging curricula can be stymied by district or state assessments focusing on basic skills.

Even if some schools succeed in developing and sustaining curricular and pedagogical improvements, the lack of system support makes it virtually impossible to generalize

changes from a small number of initially active schools to the well over 100,000 educational institutions across the country. Furthermore, the schools most likely to innovate are often the ones serving the most advantaged; the schools serving less-advantaged children frequently get left behind.

The need to improve (beyond basic skills) as an entire nation, concerns about equitable improvement for all, growing frustration with policy fragmentation, and increasing understanding about how children learn all signal that the next step in reform needs to be system-wide encouragement of ambitious, high quality outcomes. Smith and O'Day argue that we need to put the pieces of reform together in a coherent system that combines the vitality and creativity of bottom-up change at the school site with an enabling and supportive structure at more centralized levels of the system.

A Strategy for Systemic Reform

Both approaches to reform seen in the 1980s, top-down and bottom- up, are inadequate when pursued in isolation. Smith and O'Day propose a strategy for system-wide improvement that combines both approaches in a supportive policy structure that can provide direction for school-level changes and make such changes more easily adaptable to different situations. The strategy includes three major components: a unifying vision and goals, a coherent instructional guidance system, and a restructured governance system.

The policy structure is a function of state leadership. If we wish to influence more than a few schools or districts at a time, the state is a critical actor. States are in a unique position to provide coherent leadership, resources and support to the reform efforts in schools. Not only do they have constitutional responsibility for education, states are the only level that can influence all parts of the K-12 system and affect the way in which state systems of higher education might operate to help the K-12 system.

States also represent markets of sufficient size to leverage improvement in aspects of education that are outside of the system itself, such as textbook and materials development. Furthermore, states have improved in capacity for educational policymaking and have gradually amassed greater authority and responsibility over their educational systems. Increasingly, concerns about the economy and productivity of the state provide incentives for policymakers to exert educational leadership.

A Unifying Vision and Goals. To provide coherent direction for educational reform throughout the system, a state must have a common vision of what schools should be like. The vision should be informed by underlying values concerning intellectually stimulating and engaging education for *all* students. Broad conceptions and values, however, will not be enough. We need goals that can be communicated and measured if we are to mobilize the political support necessary over time.

Some goals might address desired changes in the nature or quality of educational inputs, such as the quality of the teaching force. The most powerful goals, however, would be those related to students. Statewide student outcome goals should focus primarily on the core functions of the system; that is, on teaching and learning. And, to meet the demands of the future, they must go well beyond the "basic skills" goals of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. They must challenge the system to prepare our youth to grapple thoughtfully with those problems that defy alogrithmic solutions and to be skilled and confident learners in school and later on. Moreover, the goals and indicators must address not only the average level of opportunity and student achievement in the state but also the variation. Justice requires that the goals of the state promote equality as well as quality.

A Coherent System of Instructional Guidance. The first step in developing a coherent system of instructional guidance is to work toward agreement on a core body of challenging and engaging knowledge, skills and problem-solving capacities as goals for all students. All state policies guiding instruction would be based on these goals, forming a consistent, supportive policy structure for school improvement. Overcoming the fragmentation of the system requires coordination of the key elements affecting instruction: curriculum and curricular materials, preservice and inservice teacher training, and assessment.

Curriculum Frameworks

The basic drivers of the system would be curriculum frameworks which set out the best thinking in the field about the knowledge, processes and skills students need to know in each core curriculum area. The frameworks would emphasize depth of understanding, knowledge construction through analysis and synthesis of real life problems, hands-on experiences, and the integration of content and pedagogy. Highly qualified teams of teachers and disciplinary experts would develop the frameworks and participate in continual updating and review.

It is important to distinguish the notion of core curriculum frameworks from the more specific curricula actually taught in the schools and classrooms. The frameworks would set out themes, topics and objectives in sufficiently long-range chunks (e.g., four-year blocks) to allow maximum flexibility and creativity at the local level while establishing clear direction for the system. California is illustrative of a state that has already developed quite progressive curricular frameworks in a number of areas. They reflect the problem-solving and higher-order thinking orientation of recent reform reports (see for example, NCTM 1989; AAAS 1989), but do not detail a day-to-day, week-to-week, or even a month-to-month curriculum for teachers to follow. Instead, for the most part, they describe outcomes expected at the end of certain periods of time, such as the 4th, 8th and 11th grades.

The frameworks would provide a structure within which to organize the other important educational components. Teacher professional development programs, both preservice and inservice; teacher licensing programs; textbook and curricular materials; and testing systems should all reflect the content of the frameworks. For the frameworks to provide the type of guidance necessary to improve instruction, they must be of the highest quality possible. Only if this condition is met will they command the respect and enthusiasm of capable teachers. Furthermore, local school personnel must have freedom within the frameworks to interpret and implement instructional strategies that most effectively meet the needs of their students.

Curricular Materials

Schools must have the ultimate authority to select and/or revise and develop curricular materials. However, the state has both the responsibility and the potential leverage to assure that there is an adequate supply of

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high quality textbooks and other materials that are in line with both the letter and the spirit of the frameworks, so that teachers do not have to reinvent the wheel for every subject and every grade. States could establish a statewide adoption system that emphasizes both quality and coordination with the frameworks and stimulate private and local school development of innovative ways of teaching the core concepts, including software.

Professional Development

States must ensure that both new and practicing teachers have the content knowledge and instructional skills required to teach the content of the frameworks. Although there has been much recent ferment about improving teacher education, no major national reform effort has deliberately addressed the substantive needs of teachers beyond listing general course and degree requirements.

Given the historic independence of higher education from K-12 education, the main leverage for improving preservice education is likely to come from the state's authority to screen and credential teachers rather than from regulation of colleges and universities. Assuring that prospective teachers have the knowledge and capacity to teach well the content in state curriculum frameworks probably requires that states develop strong, progressive performance assessments based on the K-12 content objectives. Faculties in both Schools of Arts and Sciences and of Education would likely alter their courses and perhaps even their own pedagogical approaches to help insure that their graduates succeed on the new state licensing examinations.

Inservice professional development must be a key component of the overall instructional guidance system as most current teachers will remain on the job during and after the implementation of the new frameworks. States could support opportunities for both individual teachers and groups of teachers to develop and refine expertise in the content of the state frameworks and in effective pedagogical approaches. Policymakers could influence the supply of programs by allocating funds directly into program development or by providing incentives for independent organizations, such as universities or libraries, and for subunits, districts and schools, to develop programs. Demand for professional development may be influenced by continuing licensure requirements and accountability systems that encourage teachers to be knowledgeable in relevant areas of the frameworks and in effective pedagogy.

Accountability Assessment

A key component of a coherent instructional guidance system is a high quality assessment system based on the state curriculum frameworks. The assessments should monitor progress toward achievement goals for accountability and stimulate and support superior instruction, functions that cannot be served by most current assessment systems. Most places now use standardized norm-referenced tests which are purposefully divorced from the curricula of the schools and cannot measure what schools are supposed to teach.

New assessment instruments tied to state content frameworks would replace such tests, and, to avoid testing overload, they should be given infrequently. Examinations at three levels—say at the 4th, 8th and 11th grades— would provide adequate information for monitoring and at the same time provide teachers and schools a clear idea of expected outcomes. In addition, allowing for choice among examination questions, as in the current Advanced Placement exams, would allow for variation in school program, teacher expertise and student interest.

Assessment instruments require attention and support commensurate with the important role they play in the system. While current standardized and minimum competency tests reinforce teaching toward an emphasis on isolated facts and basic skills, state-of-the-art examinations based on well-designed curriculum frameworks could help encourage instruction toward higher-level goal such as depth of knowledge, complex thinking, and ability to respond to problems and produce results.

In summary, curricular materials, teacher professional development, and assessment systems based on high-quality curriculum frameworks would provide the kind of guidance to schools that would support improvements in content and pedagogy. Coordination of these various policies transforms them from a set of unrelated, or, even worse, conflicting, messages to schools into a coherent system of instructional guidance. Tying these policies to challenging content outcomes provides leadership for classroom innovations designed to enhance teaching and learning.

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A Restructured Governance System. The proposal for a coherent state system of instructional guidance comes in the midst of a long-standing but increasingly intense debate about the compatibility of centralized policy decisions on the one hand and professional discretion on the other. In fact, much of the current literature on school improvement, especially the restructuring literature, assumes that centralized policies regarding curriculum and instruction serve to undermine school personnel's efforts to improve. Smith and O'Day argue that negative effects of centralized policies relate in large measure to their fragmentation and their encouragement, deliberate or inadvertent, of traditional and no longer productive, narrow conceptions of teaching and learning.

The strategy outlined above proposes a change in both the coherence and goals of state policies so that they may set the conditions under which teacher empowerment, professionalization, and school-site management may flourish. The state would provide a clear picture of long-range goals coordinated across the various instruments of state policy but avoid dictating school curricula and activities. State activities would focus on the challenging tasks of developing consensus about learning goals, crafting policies that consistently reflect and reinforce the goals and providing support to schools in reaching the goals. School-level personnel would develop specific curricula, programs and pedagogies designed to achieve the goals.

Establishing divisions of authority that draw on the strengths of each level of government requires a rethinking of traditional responsibilities, a redesign of governance. Since the major responsibilities of the state in constructing a coherent guidance system have already been described, the following sections focus on the school, upon which the success of this enterprise ultimately depends, and the district, which must offer the school maximum support.

Governance at the School Building Level

Schools obviously have many responsibilities, but with respect to achievement on the state content goals, the school's primary job is to develop a stimulating, supportive, and creative environment to maximize achievement. The restructuring literature and older literature on effective schools suggest three practical ingredients for instructional success: a staff of well-trained professionals who could use their knowledge and experience to follow the best practices appropriate to their students to meet state goals; an internal governance structure that grants those closest to students, the teachers, important decision-making roles and time for collaborative planning and reflective and professional development activities; and hardware and resources necessary for productive, professional workplaces (Purkey and Smith 1983, 1985; Cohen 1983; Elmore and Associates 1990).

These ingredients have strong governance implications for schools. They suggest that schools need sufficient autonomy to shape their programs to meet local conditions and the needs of their students, and that the selection of staff, inservice strategies, curriculum (within the state guidelines) and pedagogies should be done at the school site. They also underscore the importance of teacher participation in school decision making and the need for teachers to have time and facilities for collaborative activities in service of improved instruction. Such school-based changes are the focus of many current restructuring experiments. Smith and O'Day' argue that, while these elements are fundamental to improvement, without the changes in the policy structure proposed previously, they will not lead to meaningful or sustained change in teaching and learning.

New Book Examines Curriculum and Accountability Policies

"Systemic School Reform," is just one chapter of a new book that looks at some of the most crucial issues in education today.

The book is organized into three sections. Section 1 describes state-level changes in curriculum policy and assesses the initial impacts of policy changes at different levels of the system. Section 2 focuses on changes in testing and accountability provisions and explores some of the early results of those changes. Section 3 discusses systemic reform of instructional guidance both in this country and abroad.

Four chapters draw directly from research conducted by CPRE:*

"Graduation vs. Education: Reform Effect for At-Risk Youth,"
Janice H. Patterson

"Educational Policy in a Situation of Uncertainty; Or, How to Put Eggs in Different Baskets"
William H. Clune

"Systemic School Reform"
Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day

"Reforming the Curriculum: Will Empowerment Policies Replace Control?"
Andrew C. Porter, Doug A. Archbald, and Alexander K. Tyree, Jr.

The Politics of Curriculum and Testing: The 1990 Yearbook of the Politics of Education Association
Edited by Susan H. Fuhrman and Betty Malen

1991, 288 pp., hardcover $55 – softcover $25.50

Available from: E. Streisand, Falmer Press, 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007-1598; phone, (215) 785-5800.

* Reprints of these four chapters are available directly from CPRE. Send $4.50 for each title ordered to: CPRE, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901.

Governance at the School-District Level

The main responsibility of the local district would be to provide resources and a supportive environment for the schools. Districts should examine aspects of their operations, including central bureaucracies and rules intended to standardize practice, that might inhibit innovative and effective school-based instructional approaches. Districts must also assure equitable distribution and use of common and base budget resources across schools, and administer special program resources in ways that maximize opportunities for needy children.

Districts may also deem it appropriate to establish their own long- range goals for improvements in student achievement and other areas that embellish the state goals— progressive districts might add such things as student participation and local service goals. Such long-term directions should guide board and superintendent activities, enabling them to eschew short-term "projects" and disruption in favor of steady nourishment to schools. One example of this might be a two- or three-year budget. Unions could assist by avoiding or waiving contract provisions which require standardized practice and inhibit the flexibility schools need to maximize achievement on the content goals.

These changes imply changing district operations so they focus on providing support to schools to reach the content goals. Central bureaucracies would shift from enforcement of requirements about practice to activities designed to assist schools improve instruction. Such a change would be greatly facilitated by a reform of state policy away from separate projects, each accompanied by a set of regulations and requiring a discrete administrative structure at the district level, toward coherent instructional guidance.

Conclusion

The strategy outlined by Smith and O'Day calls for combining systemic state-initiated reform and school-based reform (restructuring) to create something with considerably more chance of succeeding than either type of reform carried out independently. The structure provided by coherent state leadership could enhance the potential of school-based strategies.

For example, under various approaches to parental choice, the state curriculum frameworks would establish a protective structure that would help ensure that all schools were attempting to provide a challenging and progressive curriculum. Similarly, state examinations based on the curriculum frameworks would provide valid data about student outcomes to help parents and students make choices.

Schools could vary considerably on specific curricula, instructional strategies, extracurricular activities and other factors on which choices could be based.

Implementing a systemic reform strategy would require leadership and long-term perspectives on the part of policymakers as well as the support and involvement of professionals who would participate in developing the state instructional guidance system and take responsibility for high-quality programming at the school level. All participants, as well as the public, would understand that such an effort is not another "wave" of reform, another short-term strategy. In essence, Smith and O'Day have proposed a strategy for combining the "waves" of reform into a long-term improvement effort, a strategy for putting coherence and direction into the state reforms and content into the restructuring movement. ■

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CPRE Wins Two New Grants, Expands Research Mission

Two new five-year federal grants to study education reform policy and school finance have led to some changes at CPRE. Formerly known as the Center for Policy Research in Education, CPRE now is the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. The Consortium operates two separately funded, but interlinked research centers: The Policy Center and The Finance Center.

Both centers are funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Members of CPRE are Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; The University of Southern California; Harvard University; Michigan State University; Stanford University; and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Research Agenda

The research agenda for both the CPRE Policy Center and Finance Center is built around three goals:

- To focus program and finance policy research on policies that foster high levels of learning for students from a broad range of social and economic backgrounds;
- To conduct research that will lead to greater coherence of state and local program and finance policies that promote student learning; and
- To conduct research that will increase the responsiveness of state and local finance and program policies to the diverse needs of students, schools, postsecondary institutions, communities and states.

The Policy Center

Center research is designed to examine how policies influence student learning and suggest implications for developing improved policy approaches. Studies address some of the following questions:

- How are the experiences and achievement of at-risk high school students influenced by various approaches to state, local and school-based curriculum control?
- How do different types of financial incentive policies influence teacher motivation?
- How does state performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) relate to state policy, fiscal and demographic characteristics and to what extent may trends in achievement be related to practice and policy?
- How do states design policies that integrate around clear learning objectives? What factors influence policy coherence?
- How and why do districts vary in allocating responsibilities between central office and schools? What are the effects of various approaches to task allocation?
- How do states respond to district and school variation through differential treatment strategies such as regulatory flexibility, outcome-based accountability and targeted technical assistance?

The Finance Center

Center research focuses on ways to create new finance policies that help improve the quality of education and student achievement. Studies address some of the following questions:

- What do K-12 education dollars buy in states with different funding systems, by type of student, educational level, and subject area? How do the differences relate to productivity?
- How does state finance policy relate to other education policies and evolve over time? How are new school finance reforms designed and implemented and what effects do they have on equity, services and outcomes?
- How does the U.S. spend education resources compared other industrialized countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Australia? How do differences in the use of resources relate to differences in results?
- How can new incentives induce university and college academic departments to recruit and retain minority and low-income students in undergraduate programs?
- How can the quality of college and university academic departments be improved while costs are contained?
- What are the linkages among school quality, academic experiences, skills learned, postsecondary-secondary attainment and labor market outcomes?

In addition to conducting research as described above, CPRE publishes reports and briefs on a variety of education issues.* The Consortium also sponsors regional policy workshops for state and local policymakers.

For further information on CPRE contact: Lynn McFarlane, assistant director for communications, CPRE, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901; phone (908) 828-3872.

*The views expressed in CPRE publications are those of individual authors and not necessarily those of the Consortium, its institutional members, or the U.S. Department of Education.

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